

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2012

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 0682

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, ELAB, GT

SUBJECT: LABOR DISPUTES: SOCIAL SECURITY WORKERS RETURN TO
WORK, ELECTRIC WORKERS BEGIN STRIKE

REF: GUATEMALA 581, 669

SUMMARY: WORKERS AT SOCIAL SECURITY INSTITUTE (IGSS) AGREED TO
RETURN TO WORK FEBRUARY 4 FOLLOWING LABOR MINISTER'S
PROMISE TO SEEK WAGE INCREASES FOR THEM AFTER MARCH ELECTIONS.
UNION, HOWEVER, PUBLISHED STATEMENT WHICH ACCUSED GOG
OF ACTING IN BAD FAITH WITH ITS OWN POLITICAL MOTIVES
IN MIND, AND SPOKE OF FUTURE IN WHICH A REGIME OF
"TRUE SOCIAL JUSTICE" WOULD RULE. GOG HAD REFUSED TO ACCEDE TO
DEMANDS OF ELECTRICAL WORKERS AND THEY BEGAN ILLEGAL
STRIKE ON FEBRUARY 2, PROMISING NOT TO INTERRUPT
ELECTRIC SERVICE.

1. WORKERS AT SOCIAL SECURITY INSTITUTE ENDED THEIR
ILLEGAL STRIKE AFTER MEETING WITH MINISTER OF
LABOR FEBRUARY 1. UNION HAD ACCEPTED WAGE INCREASE
OFFER MADE BY IGSS LAST WEEK BUT GOVERNMENT LATER
RENEGED AND MINISTER PROMISED ONLY TO SEEK WAGE
INCREASES AFTER MARCH 3, ELECTION. AFTER ACCEPTING
LABOR MINISTER'S PROMISE, UNION PUBLISHED STATEMENT
ACCUSING GOG OF HAVING USED DISPUTE FOR ITS OWN
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POLITICAL ENDS AND FOR HAVING ACTED IN BAD FAITH. THE

UNION DECLARED THAT, "IN LIGHT OF THE DANGER THAT THE DISPUTE COULD BE USED AS A PRETEXT FOR INTERRUPTING INSTITUTIONALITY," STRIKE WOULD BE ENDED IMMEDIATELY. UNION, HOWEVER, "RESERVED RIGHT TO REINITIATE ITS PETITION FOR BETTER SALARIES IN NEAR FUTURE, WHEN A REGIME OF TRUE SOCIAL JUSTICE RULES." ON FEBRUARY 4, ALL IGSS FACILITIES WERE OPERATING NORMALLY.

2. AT EMPRESA ELECTRICA (THE GOG-OWNED ELECTRIC DISTRIBUTION COMPANY FOR GUATEMALA CITY AND NEARBY DEPARTMENTS), WORKERS BEGAN ILLEGAL STRIKE ON FEBRUARY 2 AFTER GOVERNMENT AND EMPRESA MANAGEMENT REFUSED DEMANDS FOR INCREASED WAGES AND CHANGE OF WORK HOURS. UNION PROMISED THAT STRIKE WOULD NOT AFFECT DISTRIBUTION OF ELECTRIC POWER.

3. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH END OF IGSS STRIKE REMOVED ONE IMPORTANT IRRITANT FROM POLITICAL SCENE, WORDING OF UNION BROADSIDE AGAINST GOG WILL GIVE AMMUNITION TO THOSE IN GOVERNMENT WHO CLAIM THAT WHOLE DISPUTE WAS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED. ATTACK MAY WELL HAVE BEEN INTENDED BY UNION LEADERS TO KEEP CREDIBILITY WITH MEMBERS AFTER AGREEING TO END STRIKE WITHOUT GETTING ANYTHING BUT PROMISES. GOVERNMENT'S PRIMARY CONCERN IN EMPRESA DISPUTE APPEARS TO BE TO ASSURE CONTINUED ELECTRIC POWER SUPPLY. IF UNION INTERRUPTS SERVICE, GOG WILL PROBABLY MOVE TOWARD MORE DRASTIC MEASURES, BUT, UNTIL THEN, GOVERNMENT WILL PROBABLY RELY ON TACTIC OF PUBLICIZING HIGH WAGES RATES PAID TO EMPRESA WORKERS AND OTHER LESS SEVERE MEASURES.
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